

THE HEARING OF FAITH

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A SERMON
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*"This only would I learn of you, Received you the Spirit by the
works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"*
Galatians 3:2.

A GREAT delusion is upon the heart of man as to his salvation. His ways are perverse. He does not love the law of God, no, his mind is opposed to it and yet he sets up to be its advocate. When he understands the spirituality and severity of the law, he reckons it to be a sore burden. And yet, when the gospel is preached and set forth as the gift of sovereign grace, and he is bid simply to accept it by an act of faith in Christ Jesus, the man professes great concern about the law, lest it should be made void by the freeness of grace. He takes the broken pieces of the two tables of the law and hurls them at the cross. It is not that man loves the law of God, but that he does not love the God of the law. Hence he will resort to any pretense to oppose that way of salvation which God has appointed. Doubtless, if it had been possible for the Lord to have set forth another way of salvation, man would have opposed that also, for he is determined to walk contrary to God. Be that as it may, there is a constant animosity in the minds of unregenerate men against the way of salvation by faith in Christ, and to oppose it, they set up the pretense of salvation by the works of the law.

Brethren, in all our hearts there is this natural enmity to God and to the sovereignty of His grace. Therefore it is that believers have often to complain of the difficulties of faith. Faith in itself is, or ought to be, the easiest thing in the world, for a creature to believe in its Creator, for a child to believe in his father, ought to be the simplest and most natural thing in the world. But by reason of the corruption that remains even in the regenerate, there is always a struggling against this simple way of faith. There are times with the best man, when in recollection of his many sins, conscience says, "How can you believe that you are justified and accepted while so much of evil is found in you?" Unless we cleave to the promise of God and to His free mercy in Christ Jesus it will then, go hard with us. The soul of the most sincere and upright man may be driven to despair by a sight of his own imperfections unless he clings to that righteousness by which sinners are justified through faith in Christ Jesus.

Beloved, if this warfare is discovered, even in the minds of those who are born-again, we must not wonder that it rages in the unregenerate. One would have thought that the moment we preached salvation by faith every sinner would have leaped up and accepted it. It is so simple, so easy, that surely every man would wish in this way to be forgiven and justified. Instead of which, all the reasoning, all the thoughtfulness, yes, all the cunning of unregenerate human nature is stirred up to fight against the method of deliverance by faith in Christ Jesus. "It is too good to be true," says one, and another cries, "If this is preached, it will lead men to think little of moral excellence." A third finds, in the doctrines of grace, inducements to inaction and so on, without end. These quibblings take hundreds of shapes, but after all they come to this, proud sinners must dictate to their offended Lord, and be forgiven on their own terms. It would appear that God does not know the best way of saving men, and men are so wise that they amend His methods! Is not this a refinement of blasphemy? It is a hideous farce to see a rebellious sinner suddenly become jealous about good works and greatly concerned for public morality. Does it not make laughter in hell to see licentious men censuring the pure gospel of the Lord Jesus, and quibbling at free forgiveness because it might make men less mindful of purity? It makes one sick to see the hypocrisy of legalists.

The reason of this contention lies in the fact that man is not only poor, but proud, not only guilty, but conceited, so that he will not humble himself to be saved upon terms of divine charity. He will not con-

sent to believe God. He prefers to believe in the proud falsehoods of his own heart, which delude him into the flattering hope that he may merit eternal life. Against this wicked spirit our text enters the fight. Let us see how it conducts the combat. The argument of the text is a very plain and powerful one. Paul puts it thus, "The Holy Spirit has been received by you Galatians. How did you receive the Holy Spirit—by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith?" They were bound to admit, each one for himself, that they received the Holy Spirit by faith and by no other means.

Now, the Holy Spirit is the choicest of all the gifts of God which are received into the soul, and it is by the Spirit, the work of the Lord Jesus is known and received. The Holy Spirit is Himself, the seal of divine favor, and the token that we are at peace with God. I might almost say that the reception of the Holy Spirit is salvation, for when He enters into us we are saved from death in sin, from the love of sin, from the power of sin, and from the terror of sin. When He reigns in the heart, all the graces of a perfect character attend upon Him as courtiers upon a king. He becomes the source of life, light, love and liberty to our souls, and He even sanctifies our bodies. Know you not that your bodies are the temples of God when the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in them? To whom then the Holy Spirit is given, salvation is given in the highest sense. But how is that Holy Spirit received? The question is soon answered. He is not received by the works of the law, but by the hearing of faith.

I am going to handle this fact, first, as *an argument of experience for all the people of God*, and secondly, as *an argument, at least, of observation for those who are seeking after Christ*. May the Holy Spirit graciously aid us in our discourse.

I. First, then, here is AN ARGUMENT OF EXPERIENCE FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

Before I dwell upon the personal experience of believers who are here present, I would remind you of *the experience of the church of God as it is recorded in the Acts of the Apostles*. The book of the Acts of the Apostles is a confirmation of the correct answer to my text. The disciples were met together after our Lord's ascension and the Holy Spirit descended upon them, but in what way? Simply by their obeying the command of the Lord Jesus, "who commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, says He, you have heard of Me." The gift was received by the hearing of faith, which led them to united prayer and waiting. They performed no ceremonies and entered upon no labors. The watchword was, "Tarry you till you are endowed with power from on high." The power came that they might work and not because they had worked. The gift of the Spirit came according to promise and not according to works. Very speedily the Spirit of God fell upon the people outside and three thousand of them were converted and baptized. How came the Spirit of God upon Parthians, Medes, Elamites, the dwellers in Mesopotamia and so forth? Was it by the works of the Law? No, beloved. Peter thus preached (Acts 2:38), "Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." When the thousands believed in Christ Jesus and confessed their faith by baptism, the Holy Spirit was given them. So was it also in Samaria, "When they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." And then we read that the apostle Peter went to them and these believers received the Holy Spirit, certainly not by the works of the law, but by the hearing of faith were they thus blessed. Turn to the story of Cornelius. That good man had abounded in almsgiving and prayer, and yet the Holy Spirit fell not upon him. But when the "hearing of faith" came, and they were assembled in the house with one accord to listen to Peter, then the Holy Spirit fell upon all them that heard the word. "And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also, was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, "Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Spirit as well as we?" Was it not the same when Paul went out and preached among the Gentiles? It was indeed so, startlingly so, that the news came to the Hebrew Christians who were at Jerusalem and no small dissension and disputation was the consequence. Here had been no circumcision, no proselyting to Judaism, no observation of any part of the Mosaic ritual, and yet they heard that the Holy Spirit had fallen upon the Gentiles, who had not even known the Law, much less fulfilled it. It needed all of Peter's influence to stem the flood. Hear how he puts it, "God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, which knows the hearts, bore them witness, giving them

the Holy Spirit, even as He did unto us.” The Holy Spirit was received by believing Gentiles in every place where Paul had preached, and therefore he could refer to these Galatians and use their experience to correct their errors. The fact that the Holy Spirit is given to the hearing of faith and not as a reward of works, runs like a silver thread through the whole of the Acts of the Apostles. Why then, should men look to the works of the law for that which was never given except to faith? What an infatuation to look to the mirage when a real well is open at their feet!

Now I come to *your own experience*. You, beloved friends, if you are indeed in Christ Jesus have received the Holy Spirit. But how? Let us go over the list of His operations upon your minds. You received enlightenment by His means, by which you were led to understand the way of salvation, and to behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Did you attain to that enlightenment by the works of the law? Was it so in any one case? It has been my privilege to know many of you and to remember your confessions of faith. You told me that when you were seeking salvation by your own works you were blind and saw not the light. The more you strove and the more you struggled, the more intense the midnight grew about you until you well-near despaired. Light came by a look at the Crucified. It came only by “the hearing of faith.”

After that, you received peace, which peace, I trust, you enjoy this morning—“The peace of God which passes all understanding.” But did you receive that peace while you were trusting in ceremonies, in baptism, or in the Lord’s supper, or in your own works? I know you did not, for true peace of conscience comes not in at that door. Did you obtain peace while you tried to repent so much, to weep so much, to feel so much, or to do so much? No, brethren, not an atom of peace ever came to your spirit until you looked away from yourself to the Lord Jesus, of whom you heard that He was able to save even the chief of sinners, and in whom you therefore, believed. When faith came peace grew out of it as a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

Since then, you have received the Holy Spirit to help you in your sanctification, but you have obtained no sanctification apart from believing. If you have reached after sanctification by your own efforts, made in unbelief, you have never succeeded. Unbelief works towards sin and never towards sanctification. Our good works are fruits of sanctification, not causes of it, and if we put the fruit where the root should be, we greatly err. If you have gone out to fight against a temptation in your own strength, have you ever returned a conqueror? It has been written of all other believers, “They overcame through the blood of the Lamb,” and this is true of you also. Sanctification does not come to us from self-reliance, but as a work of the Spirit received by faith in Christ. Believing in Him, He is “made of God unto us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.”

You have had besides, dear friends, another gift of the Holy Spirit, namely, that of communion with God. But did you ever commune with the holy God on the footing of your own goodness? Never. Abraham never spoke with Jehovah on legal terms, for when he interceded with the Lord, he said, “I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord—I that am but dust and ashes.” Yet he spoke with God in wondrous nearness, and that is the point of it—to be dust and ashes in your own sight, and yet to commune with God as a friend. This is the daring of faith. This the Lord delights in. David said, “So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before You. Nevertheless I am continually with You: You have held me by my right hand.” A beast in his own esteem, and yet upheld by God Himself, and allowed to live in favored fellowship with Him!

Dear friends, there is no communion with God except by faith, without which we cannot ever please God. The favorites of heaven are in every case, men who believe in God. Faith has the golden key of the ivory palaces. Faith opens the secret chambers of communion to those who love her. The works of the law bring no nearness to God, in token whereof, none might come near to Sinai and if so much as a beast touched the mountain, it must be stoned or thrust through with a dart.

And you, dear friends, have received the Holy Spirit often as your helper in prayer, “The Spirit also helps our infirmity.” And I am sure it never was by the works of the law. When infirmity has stopped your prayers and you could not cry as you would, then you have had no room to boast of good works, and yet then the Spirit has made “intercession for you with groans that could not be uttered.” Your infirmity made you feel that it was by grace and by grace alone, that you were helped in your time of need.

Now, as to the Holy Spirit's office of sealing the soul and working full assurance in the heart, as to the Holy Spirit's being the earnest of the future glory, the pledge of joys to come—in all these grace reigns, and not merit. He that dwells in the least degree upon any phantom merit of his own has no earnest of the inheritance whatever. In fact, for him there is no inheritance, since an inheritance does not come by works. Neither has he that trusts in his works any pledge of joys to come, for he does not know that he has done enough to secure them. Neither can he have any comfortable rest in God, for his work is not finished and therefore he cannot rest. You know it, you that have toiled to save yourselves. Every Christian here must confess, "It is even so, we have received everything by faith and nothing by merit." Well, then, the inference is this, do not pump a dry well. If there is a fountain that is always flowing and overflowing, keep to it. Do not commit the double evil of forsaking the fountain of living water, and hewing out for yourselves broken cisterns. Wait at that door which you have received everything as yet and do not go where you have received nothing except conviction and condemnation. Look not to Moses to bring you into Canaan; that can only be done by Joshua Jesus.

Now, mark this inference, let every child of God ponder it—*keep to "the hearing of faith."* When you are under a sense of backsliding, when you feel unworthy to be called God's child, when you have erred and strayed from His ways like a lost sheep, do not rush like a madman to the law, for that would be to leap into the fire, but still say, "Lord, I believe in You. As a sinner I trust the sinner's Substitute." Whether you did truly come to Christ at the first or not, is a point which you need not discuss, but begin again. Take with you words, and come by faith to Jesus, and say, "Heal my backsliding. Receive me graciously and love me freely." By faith we can be restored, but never by doubting and despairing. We can only come to Christ by faith at first, and we can only return to Him in the same way. If you begin to doubt the mercy and love of God to you, you will backslide more and more. Your hope lies in holding on to this—"Be I what I may, yet God has not changed, and there is still forgiveness with Him, that He may be feared. Therefore I will go with the language of the 51st psalm upon my tongue, and the penitence of David in my heart, and I will say, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.'" Stick to your faith in Christ. Do not think that the greatness of your sin exceeds His atoning merit. Do not doubt but that He will still cleanse you and love you as before.

Suppose you have not backslidden, but yet you are in the presence of a tremendous inward conflict. I will suppose that you are led to question whether you are the children of God at all, and persuaded to doubt your sonship. Now, be resolved to hold on to your faith in your heavenly Father. The devil is saying to you, "If you are the son of God." Do not yield to his "if." This is the way in which he attacked your Savior in the wilderness. A question about our sonship is the very point of the devil's sword and it is dipped in deadly poison. Therefore guard yourself with that Word of God, "To as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believed on His name." Say, "I believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, who died for the ungodly, and in Him I am assured of being a child of God." You cannot resist temptation by doubting. Doubting is weakness, in believing is your might. "How can I believe," asks one. The elect of God believe, those who are born from above believe their Father's Word. If you can believe, you shall win great victories, but if you cast away your confidence, the battle is already lost. Above all, or over all, carry the shield of faith. Be sure to do this in the evil day when sin prevails. Is this too hard for you? What? Has it come to this, that when you feel you are a saint you can then trust to Christ? That is, you can trust Him when you can do without Him. Poor sham of faith! The genuine faith is a sinner's faith, which trusts the Savior when signs, and evidences, and marks are all hidden, and sin and temptation hold the upper seats. To believe that I, a sinner, am forgiven by the free grace of God, that I, a poor, imperfect being, am yet accepted of God—this is faith. May we have power to trust the Lord Jesus in earnest; to trust Him with real sin and real unworthiness.

Do this, dear friends, with regard to the whole of your life's struggle. Some begin their religious life in the Spirit by faith, but they fancy that the rest of their spiritual life will have to be by works. They forget that the just shall live by faith. Those who say that though they are children of God, they may perish after all, have not the true gospel ring about them. If they are children of God, can they perish? How? Why? "Well, we must be watchful and prayerful." Precisely so. But is there no provision made to secure that you shall be watchful and prayerful? If not, then I tell you, brothers and sisters, you will never get to heaven. You will fail in this watchfulness of yours and then where are you? My hope of heaven lies in

the belief that the Lord Jesus has redeemed me and will keep me. He will make me watchful and prayerful, and work in me by His Spirit all else that is essential to my safety. "I know whom I have believed," and I am not afraid to add, "I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him until that day." Brothers and sisters, it is by such faith that we receive the Spirit, and not by legal works and fears.

At this present moment you are saved by faith, alone, are you not? Yes. Then I would persuade you to extend that faith over the whole area of your life. Believe for final preservation. Believe for complete salvation. Is it not written "He that believes on Him has *everlasting life*"? Can that life which is everlasting come to an end? Can eternal life expire? "Faithful is He that has called you, who also will do it." "Oh," you say, "I am half afraid to believe so bravely, for it might make me careless." This is a mistake, faith *works* by love, and it never tends to sloth. My dear friend, if you look to yourself in any degree your foot is beginning to slip. Put the future where you put the past, namely, into the hands of Him that is able to keep you from falling. Believe in Jesus for a life as well as for an hour, and He will keep you with spotless garments to the end. Stand on the sure rock of the Lord's finished work and not on the dubious ground of your own carefulness. Works done by the efforts of our own strength are poor things, but the work of the grace of God upon our spirit is precious. Let all be of grace and nothing of self. The two will no more go together than oil and water will mix. Do not try to trust partly in Christ and partly in self, as well yoke an archangel with an ant, or a cherub with a cricket. Salvation is of the Lord alone from first to last.

Brethren, let us keep in this condition when we are comparing ourselves with other saints of God. I sometimes read biographies which make me cover my face for shame because I fall so far short of the attainments of certain believers. This humbling is good for us. What ought we to do when we feel it? To begin to doubt the Lord, and imagine that the Lord Jesus cannot or will not save us? Far from it. Faith should rise by observing what the Lord has done for other poor sinners like ourselves, for He is able to do the same for us. Remember that the safety of the weak and of the strong believer rests upon the same foundation. This may be seen in a figure. On board one of the fine steamboats which flit between England and America I see a strong, hardy, vigorous man. Will he get to America safely? Yes, if the ship does. But look, yonder is a little child which cannot walk and has to be carried in its mother's arms. Will it reach America safely? Yes, if the ship does. Both the robust man and the whimpering infant, all being well, will reach their journey's end—if the ship does. Their safety lies in the same place. Their condition does not affect their transit. But is there no difference between the child and the man? Assuredly, a great deal of difference as to many things, but there is no difference about the fact that their passage across the ocean depends upon the steamboat, rather than upon themselves. The strong man could not walk across the Atlantic any more than the child could. They are alike incompetent for the passage if left alone, and alike capable of it if placed on board the same vessel. So, if you meet with a great saint, say to yourself, "My honored brother will get to heaven through Jesus Christ. And I, a poor babe in grace, shall get to heaven in the same way." I want you children of God to feel this. Are you on board the Covenant transport? Does the blood-red flag fly at the masthead? Then, if the weakest believer is not safely carried into port, neither will the strongest child of God reach the fair havens. If that ship of free grace goes down, Peter and Paul must sink as well as ourselves, for we are at sea in the same vessel. Our confidence is in no measure or sense in what we are, but altogether in what Christ is on our behalf. We depend on Jesus and rest in Jesus by a simple faith and the brightest of martyrs and apostles has no surer ground to rest on.

When you come to die, do not look upon death through the glass of the law, for if so, it will be terrible for you. But believe this, that to die by faith is to enter into life. I hardly like to use the word, death in such a connection, for it is not dying at all, but "departing out of this world unto the Father." By faith to die is such sweet work as you, poor Despondency, and you, Much-Afraid, will be able to accomplish as safely as Valiant-for-Truth, or Great-Heart himself. By faith we swallow up death in victory. They that have served God for 50 years faithfully and without fault, when they come to die, have in every case gathered up their feet in the bed and said, "Into Your hands I commit my spirit." But never has one of them died pleading his own religiousness and claiming a reward as due to his deserts. Trusting in Jesus is the universal spirit of the most praiseworthy believers. Well, if they flung every other hope away ex-

cept that which was presented to them in Christ, you, dear friend, need not hesitate to do the same. And as they were secure and triumphant, even so shall you be.

This is the argument, then—you have obtained nothing except by the hearing of faith, therefore, keep to the way of faith even to your last hour, for wisdom teaches you to do so.

II. But now I want to throw all my strength into the second part of the sermon, which is this, I want to use this AS AN ARGUMENT DERIVED FROM OBSERVATION FOR THE USE OF SEEKERS. I say “observation,” but in part it might be called an argument from experience, for at any rate, on the negative side it is so.

Listen, dear hearer, you have not yet found rest, you are not yet saved, and so far you have obtained no advantage by the works of the law. By your own honesty, generosity and righteousness, you have not been justified, nor have you received a new heart, or any other gift of the Spirit. Why continue at this unprofitable business? Some try church attendance, Chapel attendance, Bible-reading, sacraments, forms of prayer, and the like, but nothing comes of it. Hear how they repeat their Ave Marias and their Pater Nosters. And not only Romanists, but so-called Protestants, are puffed up with the hope that by formal worship they will be saved. But they make no headway and are still without salvation. Let me ask you work-trusters, have you any rest? Are you prepared to die? Would you be willing to die at once? No. Your position is one of unrest, and fear and dread. Why not abandon this vain method of building, for “except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it.” Instead of following out your own way of salvation by the works of the law, why not try the Lord’s appointed way of the hearing of faith? Has He not said, “Hear and your soul shall live”? Are willing to let me explain it?

The “hearing of faith,” this is the way by which the Spirit of God comes to men. “What kind of hearing,” asks one, “is that?” Well, to begin with, it is *personal hearing*, listening to the word for yourself. I have heard of one who had a dream in which he thought he stood at the gates of heaven, and his wife with him. She went in, but the pointer shut him out, saying, “The other day you said to your wife, ‘Mistress, you may go to church and pray for us both,’ and now she shall go to heaven for you both, and you must stay outside.” Is not that just? There must be a personal hearing. I pray you, do not absent yourselves from the hearing of the word, for “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

That last sentence reminds me that the hearing *must be the hearing of the gospel*. I wish people were more careful upon that point. You will not receive the Holy Spirit by merely hearing a man talk. He may be eloquent, he may be clever and he may be pious, but mark you, if he does not preach the gospel, saving faith cannot come of your hearing it. Too many people go to that place of worship which is nearest to their houses, and never mind what is preached so long as there is an attractive service. Oh, sirs, do not thus play the fool with yourselves. The faith that saves you cannot come to you by hearing anything which comes first. It only comes by hearing the testimony of the Spirit to the appointed Savior.

The right kind of hearing is *an attentive hearing*. There is a great difference between hearing and hearing. If I were to say, “There is a ship going to sail next Tuesday for New Zealand,” the most of you would hear it and think no more of it. But suppose there should be a person here who is in great haste to reach New Zealand? He will catch at my words and be around in the vestry to make further inquiries. This is the kind of hearing which the gospel requires. You are in one of our great stations and you hear a person say, “That train is for Exeter.” The information is lost upon you, for you are bound for Oxford, and it is as though you heard it not. But suppose you were bound for Exeter? You would catch at the sound and make use of the news. Now, I am talking about the salvation of man from the power of sin, the salvation of man from the guilt of sin, the preparation of man for a holy life on earth and an eternal life of bliss in heaven, if you have the hearing of faith, you will feel that this subject is one which concerns yourself. You will be anxious to know more about it and you will give your mind to its consideration. This is the sort of hearing by which faith comes. Do not lend your ears to others, but hear for yourself. Go where the gospel is preached, and hear it with both your ears. Drink it in as an ox drinks at the stream. Treasure up every word as the ants store up grain. Test all as goldsmiths test gold, and then receive the truth as babes drink in milk from the breast. This is “the hearing of faith.”

“But what is this *faith*,” asks one, “this ‘hearing of faith?’” I will try to work out the idea. You begin with hearing the gospel and believing that it comes from God. I suppose nearly everybody here believes the Bible to be the Word of God. Very well, when you hear that teaching which is consistent with Scrip-

ture, the hearing of faith is to accept it as God's Word, and therefore true and worthy of your reverent attention. The gospel is the voice of God, and it comes by the Spirit of God. A belief of this truth will help you to hear it reverently, and it will prepare your mind to receive it.

Then remember that, if it is God's Word, a genuine faith in God knows of no difficulties whatever. A man who believes the Bible to be inspired, just as readily believes that the whale swallowed Jonah, or that Joshua stopped the sun, as he believes that Abraham interceded for Sodom, or that Paul was a prisoner at Rome. Knowing the gospel to be God's testimony, we believe it *all*. That is the way in which to hear the gospel. Say to yourself, "This is God's gospel. It is wonderfully grand and good, but it is not therefore a matter of doubt. That I may be saved in one single minute by believing in Jesus, that every sin I have ever committed, however black, may all be washed away as the clock ticks again—these are wonderful things, but I believe them because the Lord has said so. It is not mine to quibble, question, or argue, if there are any difficulties in these great promises, those difficulties belong to God, and not to me. Let the Lord promise what He pleases, I am ready to believe it because He is able to perform His own word."

Then, "the hearing of faith" signifies, further, that we venture our eternal interests upon the truth of what we hear. I use the word, "venture," advisedly. One of our hymns puts it—

*"Venture on Him, venture wholly,
Let no other trust intrude."*

I have heard critics object that it is no *venture*, but a certainty, when men trust in Christ. But I venture to assert that, when a man is in trouble of spirit, faith is a venture to him, it appears to him to be the greatest venture possible. He that says, "This gospel which I have heard is true, and I will venture my soul upon the truth of it," he is the man who has given to the gospel "the hearing of faith." Let me try to set forth faith yet again. This bridge is strong enough to carry me over the stream; therefore I am going over the stream upon it. That is real faith. Faith is a most practical principle in daily life. The most of trade hangs on trust. When a man sows wheat, he has to scatter it into the furrows and lose it. He does so because he has faith that God will send a harvest. When the sailor loses sight of the shore, he has to sail by faith, believing in his compass, he feels safe though he may not see land for weeks. Faith is the hand which receives what God presents to us, and therefore it is a simple child-like thing. When a child has an apple offered to him, the child may know nothing about the orchard in which the apple grew, and he may know nothing of the mechanism of his hand and arm, but it is quite enough for him to take the apple. Faith does the most effectual thing for the soul when it takes what God gives. All the rest may be or may not be, faith is the main thing. When God holds out to me, salvation by Christ Jesus, I need not ask anything further about it, but just take it to myself and be at once saved, for by faith the Spirit of God is received.

Once more, "the hearing of faith" is when a man hears and accepts the gospel and then holds to it under opposition. When conscience reminds you that you are a guilty man, you must still hold to peace by the blood of Jesus. What says the word? It tells you that he that believes in Jesus is not condemned and you must believe that word, whatever your own judgment and feelings may say. When the devil, as the accuser of the brethren, howls out, "You cannot be saved. Look at your imperfections and transgressions!" then reply, "But I am saved, whatever my imperfections and my sins may be, for it is written, 'He that believes and is baptized shall be saved.' I have obeyed both precepts, and therefore I shall be saved, despite your rage." Poor sinner, have you not seen that this is the way the Holy Spirit has come to others? Your Christian friends have all told you that this is the way they obtained mercy. Will you not make an attempt in the same way, and hear and believe as a little child? Believe God's Word. Do not wish to be anything or to do anything, but just trust in what Jesus is and did. You shall have the Holy Spirit, and you shall feel as you have never felt before, if you will give "the hearing of faith."

I want your attention for a minute while I mention some of the points in the gospel out of which this "hearing of faith" generally comes. What truth is it which men most readily believe?

The first is this. A man says, "I cannot believe," but he can hear, and he hears that God has sent forth His Son Jesus Christ to be the Savior of men. "God has sent Him," he says, "the offended God has appointed a mediator. Christ does not come as an amateur, but as an ambassador authorized of Heaven." "Then," he says, "I will trust Him whom God has ordained to be a Savior."

Next, while listening to the gospel, the man hears about the person of the Lord, and sees who He is, namely, that He is God's only-begotten Son, equal and co-eternal with the Father, and yet He is in the fullest sense man, in our nature. I have known many a soul say, "I can trust Jesus, since He is God and able to save me, and man, and thus willing to save me." By that celestial lamp many have seen their way to faith. Oh, that faith may come to you while you are hearing me.

Another very blessed nail on which faith loves to hang all its weight is the sufferings of Christ—for, being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. See Him languishing upon the cruel tree, bleeding out His life for unworthy men, His enemies, that they might live through Him. Many and many a time, that sight has turned a doubter into a believer. Thousands have seen the cross and felt that they must believe.

Another nail of which many have learned to hang all their hope has been Christ's risen power. They have heard of Him, that He is now in glory, at the right hand of God, making intercession for transgressors, and this has been the star of hope to the desponding. Is it not a joy that God also has highly exalted Him, so that He is able to save to the uttermost all that come unto God by Him? Myriads of tremblers have felt faith leap up from their hearts like the water from the rock in the wilderness, when Christ has been set before them as exalted to be a Prince and a Savior, giving both repentance and remission of sins. They have been trying to believe before, but now they believe without trying. Trying to believe is a very stupid operation. You cannot do it. Minds work not so. But when a man sees a thing to be true, he believes it as a matter of course. He is convinced by the blessed fact of Christ's resurrection and ascension that He is able to save, and so he trusts Him to save him. Thus he receives the Spirit.

I have known many that have been led to believe by hearing of the work and grace of the Holy Spirit. They have heard the preacher say that the Holy Spirit can raise men from their death in sin, that He can renew the heart, that He can change the will, and conquer the passions. They have said, "Is it so? Is God Himself willing to work with me to make me holy? Then I will trust Him." Thus faith comes.

Sometimes also when we have preached free forgiveness, full redemption, irreversible acceptance, infinite love, boundless grace, unchallengeable justification, when we have declared that the Lord's mercy endures forever, and that men have but to look to Jesus and then and there find eternal life—then faith has dropped on men's minds as dew upon the grass. Our hearers have felt that such tidings must be true, for nobody could have invented them. The gospel has the stamp of Deity upon it, and this commends it to man's heart. Free grace and dying love are worthy of faith, and they win faith. I pray that all of you who are seekers may give up all trying to feel, and trying to work, trying to be, and may just come and put your trust in Jesus. Then shall you be saved, and then you may work, and feel, and do as much as you like. Then shall you abound in good works, and the more the merrier. Then you shall fight with sin and overcome it. Then shall you set up a high standard and reach it. Then shall you strive after holiness and manifest it. But do not begin where you ought to leave off. Do not put, as the proverb has it, the cart before the horse. Do not place the top of the house where the foundation ought to be. But as you never did obtain anything by the works of the law, come and try "the hearing of faith," and you shall receive all that you need in Christ Jesus. God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—GALATIANS 3.
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